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Definition of *persistent*

1 : existing for a long or longer than usual time or continuously: such as

a : retained beyond the usual period a persistent leaf

b : continuing without change in function or structure persistent gills

c : effective in the open for an appreciable time usually through slow [volatilizing](#) mustard gas is persistent

d : [degraded](#) only slowly by the environment persistent pesticides

e : remaining infectious for a relatively long time in a [vector](#) after an initial period of incubation persistent viruses

2a : continuing or inclined to [persist](#) in a course

b : continuing to exist despite interference or treatment a persistent cough has been in a persistent vegetative state for two years

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Other Words from *persistent*

persistently adverb

Synonyms for *persistent*

Synonyms

- [dogged](#),
- [insistent](#),
- [patient](#),
- [persevering](#),
- [pertinacious](#),
- [tenacious](#)

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Examples of *persistent* in a Sentence

Contrary to persistent myth, Hoover was an activist. — Steve Forbes, *Forbes*, 30 June 2008 The high-water mark of such truckling might be the publication of the Cato Institute report "America's Record Trade Deficit: A Symbol of Strength." Freedom had become slavery; persistent deficits had become economic power. — Eric Janszen, *Harper's*, February 2008

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Recent Examples on the Web The move comes in the wake of *persistent* student protests over the exhibit due to Wayne's history of racist remarks. — [Tyler Aquilina, EW.com, "John Wayne exhibition at USC to be removed after protests over actor's racist comments," 11 July 2020](#) Those with symptoms like a palpable lump, nipple discharge, nipple changes, *persistent* pain in the breast or changes on the skin of the breast should quickly seek care from their regular provider, such as a primary care doctor, internist or OB-GYN. — [Tracy Maness, Houston Chronicle, "MD Anderson urges patients to get mammograms despite pandemic," 6 July 2020](#)



These example sentences are selected automatically from various online news sources to reflect current usage of the word 'persistent.' Views expressed in the examples do not represent the opinion of Merriam-Webster or its



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[adjective](#)

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First Known Use of *persistent*

1826, in the meaning defined at [sense 1](#)

History and Etymology for *persistent*

Latin *persistent-*, *persistens*, present participle of *persistere* — see [persist](#)

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Time Traveler for *persistent*



The first known use of *persistent* was in 1826

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More Definitions for *persistent*

persistent

[adjective](#)




English Language Learners Definition of *persistent*

: continuing to do something or to try to do something even though it is difficult or other people want you to stop
: continuing beyond the usual, expected, or normal time : not stopping or going away

[See the full definition for *persistent* in the English Language Learners Dictionary.](#)

persistent

[adjective](#)

per·sist·ent | \ pər-ˈsi-stənt  \

Kids Definition of *persistent*

: continuing to act or exist longer than usual a *persistent* cold

Other Words from *persistent*

persistently adverb

persistent

[adjective](#)

per·sis·tent | \ -tənt  \

Medical Definition of *persistent*

1 : existing or continuing for a long time: as

a : effective in the open for an appreciable time usually through slow volatilizing mustard gas is persistent

b : degraded only slowly by the environment persistent pesticides

c : remaining infectious for a relatively long time in a vector after an initial period of incubation persistent viruses

2 : continuing to exist despite interference or treatment a persistent cough has been in a persistent vegetative state for two years

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WORD OF THE DAY

Oxford English Dictionary | The definitive record of the English language

persistent, *adj.*

Pronunciation: Brit. /pə'sɪst(ə)nt/, U.S. /pər'sɪstənt/

Forms: 17– **persistent**, 18– **persistant** (*irregular*).

Frequency (in current use):

Origin: A borrowing from Latin. **Etymons:** Latin *persistent-*, *persistens*.

Etymology: < post-classical Latin *persistent-*, *persistens*, present participle of *persistere* **PERSIST** *v.* Compare Old French, Middle French, French *persistant* (1321), Spanish *persistente* (1672). Compare earlier **PERSISTENCE** *n.* and **PERSISTING** *adj.*, **PERSISTIVE** *adj.*

With the form *persistant* compare -ANT *suffix*.

1.

a. Zoology and Botany. Of a part of an animal or plant (as a horn, leaf, calyx, etc.): remaining attached, not falling off. Of a juvenile or primitive characteristic: retained into adult life. Cf. **DECIDUOUS** *adj.* 2, **CADUCOUS** *adj.*

1.

- 1785 T. MARTYN tr. J.-J. Rousseau *Lett. Elements Bot.* xxviii. 445 The leaves of all these are linear and persistent; Linnæus calls this sort of leaf acerose.
- 1835 W. KIRBY *On Power of God in Creation of Animals* II. xxiv. 502 Lastly, come the Ruminants, whose horns are hollow and naked, but persistent.
- 1880 A. GRAY *Struct. Bot.* iii. 86 Leaves..may be..persistent, when they remain through the cold season..during which vegetation is interrupted.
- 1910 H. H. HAINES *Forest Flora Chota Nagpur* 497 *A[ina] cordifolia*... Capsules of 2 cocci dehiscent from below and towards a persistent columella.
- 1960 D. C. BRAUNGART & R. BUDDEKE *Introd. Animal Biol.* (ed. 5) xvi. 236 Elasmobranchii are cold-blooded and have jaws, a cartilaginous skeleton, gills, a persistent notochord, placoid scales, and paired fins.
- 1992 W. T. PARSONS & E. G. CUTHBERTSON *Noxious Weeds Austral.* 617/1 Bisexual flowers have a prickly tomentose calyx with persistent narrowly triangular lobes.

b. Continuous, continuing to exist; enduring, lasting; chronic.

- 1826 S. T. COLERIDGE *To Eliza in Pain* in *Let.* 3 June (1971) VI. 664 She..Of Pleasure only will to all dispense, Will ope *that* Fount alone..but still issue thence Unconquer'd Cheer, persistent Loveliness.
- 1853 E. K. KANE *U.S. Grinnell Exped.* (1856) xxxix. 360 There is a something about this persistent day antagonistic to sleep.
- 1871 L. STEPHEN *Playground of Europe* ii. 93 A persistent screen of stormy cloud drove up the valley.
- 1905 W. OSLER *Princ. & Pract. Med.* (ed. 6) 511 When there is persistent anorexia, gavage may be necessary.
- 1922 E. VON ARNIM *Enchanted April* (1989) 56 Mr Wilkins..was noticing with increasing disgust..the peculiar persistent vileness of the weather.
- 1988 *Amer. Jrnal. Public Health* 78 1591/2 This curious and persistent belief [*sc.* the Red Treatment]..was based on faith in the therapeutic efficacy of red colored objects to combat smallpox.

- 1999 C. B. INLANDER et al. *Over-the-counter Doctor* (rev. ed.) 151/2 A persistent sore throat—particularly in a child—may indicate a more serious disease.

c. Geology. Of a stratum: extending continuously over the whole area occupied by the formation; not thinning out or disappearing.

- 1833 C. LYELL *Princ. Geol.* III. 173 The individual strata are rarely persistent for a great distance.
 1865 A. GEIKIE *Scenery & Geol. Scotl.* vi. 138 Even with such doubtful forms, the two main systems remain tolerably persistent.
 1949 A. E. TRUEMAN *Geol. & Scenery Eng. & Wales* xii. 161 Some four main grit belts are present, but there are many other less persistent beds.
 1990 *Geol. Mag.* **127** 599 The Boom Clay Formation of northeast Belgium consists of a sequence of alternating, laterally persistent beds of silt and clay.

d. Ecology. That remains within an environment for a long period of time, esp. as a result of low chemical reactivity or a long radioactive half-life.

- 1920 *Times* 28 Oct. 16/1 Mustard gas was a distinctly new departure. Effective in low concentrations..., very persistent, remaining on the ground for days, it caused huge casualties.
 1955 *Bull. Atomic Scientists* Jan. 5/1 The long-range genetic danger of exposure..to low-level, but widespread and persistent radioactivity..is only beginning to be dimly perceived.
 1970 *Nature* 31 Oct. 403/2 Fresh and rain water in Britain contains small but not insignificant amounts of the chief persistent organochlorine pesticides, DDT, lindane and dieldrin.
 2000 *Scout Rep. Archives* (Internet Scout Project) (Electronic text) 11 Oct. Dioxins are a group of extremely persistent, toxic chemical compounds.

e. Virology. Of a virus: latent; present in its host but not manifest or active (though possibly replicating); (*Botany*) designating or relating to plant viruses that are carried by insect vectors within their bodies for a long period (also called *circulative*; opposed to NON-PERSISTENT *adj.*). Also of an infection: caused by such a virus.

- 1940 *Proc. Royal Soc. 1939–40* B. **128** 539 This is referred to as the 'latent' or 'incubation' period, for with most persistent viruses it seems to be..important and prolonged.
 1967 *Arch. Ophthalmol.* **77** 430 (*title*) Persistent virus infection in congenital rubella.
 1984 D. A. ROBERTS & C. W. BOOTHROYD *Fund. Plant Pathol.* (ed. 2) ix. 120 Circulative and stylet-borne viruses were formerly classified as persistent and nonpersistent viruses, respectively.
 2001 *Diabetes Care* (Nexis) 1 Aug. 1489 CMV is a persistent virus like the related herpes viruses.

f. Medicine **persistent vegetative state** *n.* a chronic condition of unconsciousness (lasting more than a month) following severe injury to the cerebral hemispheres, in which there is preservation of cardiorespiratory and certain other vital functions but no evidence of cognitive function. Abbreviated PVS.

- 1972 B. JENNETT & F. PLUM in *Lancet* 1 Apr. 734/1 Patients with severe brain damage due to trauma..may now survive indefinitely... Such patients are best described as in a persistent vegetative state.
- 1987 J. WEATHERALL et al. *Oxf. Textbk. Med.* (ed. 2) II. XXI. 51/1 The question of whether it is appropriate to provide the nutrition and nursing care required to ensure survival once the persistent vegetative state has been diagnosed is now a topic of debate.
- 1993 *U.S. News & World Rep.* 18 Jan. 78/3 At the age of 60, she suffered bleeding on the brain and went into a 'persistent vegetative state'—alive but with essentially no higher brain function.

2. Continuing firmly or obstinately in some state, opinion, purpose, or course of action, esp. despite opposition, setbacks, or failure; having or characterized by persistence.

- 1830 J. F. W. HERSCHEL *Prelim. Disc. Study Nat. Philos.* 81 Our resistance against the destruction of..prejudices..of sense, is commonly more violent at first, but less persistent, than in the case of those of opinion.
- 1868 E. EDWARDS *Life Sir W. Raleigh* I. xvi. 332 His greed, no less than his ambition,..made him a persistent colonizer.
- 1888 F. HUME *Madame Midas* I. i. 18 Her suitors—numerous and persistent as those of Penelope.
- 1916 E. H. PORTER *Just David* xvi. 205 'What a persistent little mental-science preacher you are!' she exclaimed.
- 1975 *Audubon* May 89/1 It is a perky, jaunty bird, a persistent tail-jerker that is remarkably unconcerned by or unafraid of man.
- 1993 R. JENKINS *Chief* (Anglia TV shooting script) (O.E.D. Archive) 4th Ser. Episode 3. 8 I want persistent offenders, whatever their age, locked up!

3. Of an action or event: continual, recurrent; repeated, esp. constantly or with persistence.

- 1842 R. W. EMERSON in *Dial.* July xiii. 1206 'Attractive industry' would speedily subdue, by adventurous, scientific, and persistent tillage, the pestilential tracts.
- 1857 E. L. BIRKETT *Bird's Urinary Deposits* (ed. 5) 289 The persistent occurrence of deposits of the earthy phosphates in the urine.
- 1872 T. H. HUXLEY *Lessons Elem. Physiol.* (ed. 6) iv. 100 The persistent breathing of such air tends to lower all kinds of vital energy.
- 1924 I. GERSHWIN *Fascinating Rhythm* (song) in *Lyrics on Several Occasions* (1959) 172 Got a little rhythm..That pit-a-pats through my brain; So darn persistent..it'll drive me insane.
- 1967 C. JACKSON *Second-hand Life* (1968) I. 15 Could this fact alone account for his persistent, his increasing thoughts of death?
- 1994 *Powwow Times* (Sask. Indian Federated Coll.) 34/3 It was only through the persistent urging of our elders and Indian leaders that we were able to persuade the Indian agent..to give us the permission to practise powwows once more.

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